



Digital training

Is it possible to receive proper aerial or safety training via the Internet?

Lindsey Anderson **reports on the latest developments where pen and paper take a backseat to the modern day computer**

In our ever-evolving digital age you can do just about anything online. Hungry? Order a pizza. Need a vacation? Book a flight. Interested in today's headlines? Read the news. Too busy to go to the grocery store? Yes, there's even a website dedicated to that. So is it really any surprise that some aspects of aerial lift training and certification have gone the way of the web? It all depends on who you talk to.

"Many companies shy away from online training because they assume wrongly that the online portion tries to pass off the hands-on portion," says Myron Lee, co-founder of Arxcis, Inc., a company that specializes in online, CD-based and on-site training. "This is not so. They are to be used in conjunction with each other; and, in fact, when a company utilizes online training, more often than not, the worker taking the training is more completely evaluated according to OSHA regulations than had they taken the class somewhere else."

Typically, training includes two parts: classroom and hands-on. The classroom portion teaches and tests principles: load charts, stability, regulations, operator controls, safety, maintenance procedures and more, depending on the type of training. Hands-on training observes and evaluates the student/operator to ensure the above principles are understood in the real world. It's comparable to receiving a driver's license 18>

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- there is class time with a written final test followed by actual time behind the wheel. The classroom testing proves students can remember principles and the hands-on portion proves they can apply them.

"Online safety training is simply about the classroom portion many companies are paying high prices for and taking several workers off the job for," Lee says. "...Online safety training courses are an innovative, flexible, cost-effective alternative to the traditional classroom portion - and at a fraction of the cost and time."

Keith Morical, president and founder of 4ROI, the Crane Institute of America Certification testing partner, agrees, saying it's the idea of blended learning; mixing classroom/online training with hands-on.

"In an industry like this, there are many skills where you have to do it enough to get the hang of it as well," Morical says. "So this idea of blended learning, which wasn't even in the construction industry a few years ago, is so appropriate. You get the knowledge upfront, give people time to digest, and then have these people come to the place where they're actually trying to implement that knowledge or use those skills at the controls, and it really does add to the effectiveness."

Cost savings

Debbie Dickinson, executive director of Crane Institute of America Certification (CIC), says that many big players in the industry, including the



Even the use of simulators cannot prepare students for what actual equipment use is like, says Tony Groat, executive director of AWPT.

Navy to the Army Corp. of Engineers, not only embrace, but demand, online training. "Travel is hard, it is expensive, it's not as fun as it used to be," she says, "and in a work context, days are long. So much of travel has become so expensive, and the lost time from productivity on work - all of that combined - you can train or test in an online environment. It's so much more efficient."

However, there are certain situations, places and times when testing in-person is of value, but, Dickinson says, for most of the classroom portion, online testing and training is where it's at. For CIC, nearly 80 percent of practical examiners' training is completed online. Dickinson says the online class takes on average 90 minutes less than its in-person classroom cousin and that studies have shown that online classes tend to score a few points higher, on average, than in-person testing.

Dickinson gave an example of a practical examiner test she was giving. "People will be calling in from eight different locations, I will provide them a [website] link they will go to where all of the training materials are posted, they have a handbook that's emailed to them, they have a dial-in number [to call]," she says. "We'll be dealing with every time zone in the country and the class will run from 7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. eastern time - interfering with no one's work day."

Not only does this process save time, Dickinson says, but it saves money. "It saves a full day of travel and saves a day lost on the job for them," she says. "Just in this one group that is well over \$10,000 worth of savings."

Morical agrees. "That finding of saving money and saving time is so pervasive in all the research that has been done with comparing online versus in-person training," he says. "There's just an extremely solid, consistent trend of significant



While some portions of training might be able to be completed online, hands-on training must be completed.

cost savings, significant time savings and then on effectiveness - that it just comes out to be equal. By and large, if you look at many studies, the effectiveness [of online training] is equal [to in-person training] but the time and money is heavily skewed to online."

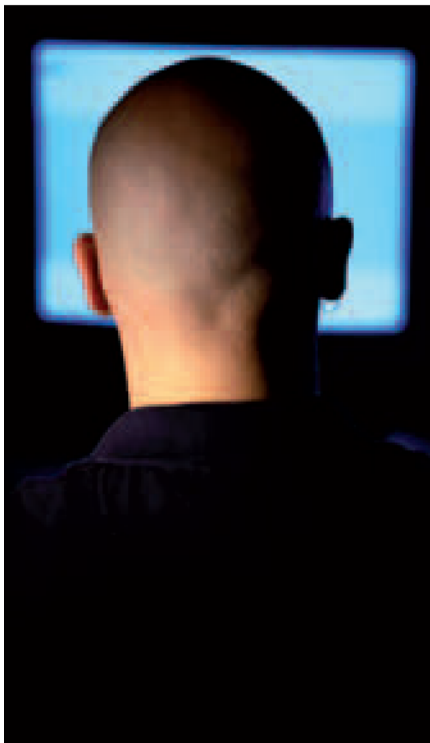
But even with time and money saved being a major pro, especially in today's economy, there are still hiccups, including the cost that will need to be fronted for software, computers and/or programs. There are also risks with the type of software or program being obtained by students - will the program be as glorious as it was advertised? And, what if the power goes out? The test will just have to wait.

Rob Vetter, director of training at IVES Training Group, believes that in-person, hands-on training - from the beginning classroom portion to the end of actual use of the equipment - is the best way to go. Vetter speaks in-depth on training in this month's safety column on page 34.

Updates and developments

According to Lee with Arxcis, the number of American adults who use the Internet has grown from 35 percent 10 years ago to 73 percent today. With more people becoming well-versed in all that is Web 2.0, there could be no better time than now to weather the economic storm with a cost-effective means of training.

"With increased demand, the online training courses offered have seen a significant increase in quality and features offered," Lee says. "While a number of online training providers have begun to surface over the last couple of years, there are a few key components to look for in effective





training: namely flexibility, interactivity, cost-efficiency and the ability to properly document what occurred during the training on an individual basis."

While there are many various forms of digital training, most online training can be taken wherever there is an Internet connection and at the student's leisure. Some might opt to do a little bit during lunch or after work, and most classes do not have to be finished in one sitting. Some programs feature quizzes at various intervals as well as other means of keeping people engaged. For Arxcis, after a student completes a course, final test results are emailed to company administrators. Certificates, evaluation forms and instructions for evaluating operators can also be downloaded and placed in a student's personal file.

"Some online training skeptics hang their objections on a misconception about OSHA regulations," Lee says. "They assume online training lacks the proper OSHA certification. In fact, OSHA does not certify any training processes, live or digital. What they do is examine, usually after an incident has occurred, whether the employee received training in the existing standards and regulations set by his or her organization."

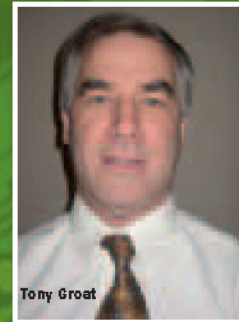
Can't teach an old dog new tricks

In the end, it's easy to be skeptical of any new way of doing things. Take, for instance, online banking or the use of debit cards. Some people still don't trust their funds or accounts being handled online, while others don't bat an eye at the idea. And ask a Generation Yer when the last time they had a wad of cash in their wallet - chances are, it's been a while. Same goes for training.

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AWPT's take

Tony Groat, executive vice president of Aerial Work Platform Training (AWPT), the North American subsidiary of the International Powered Access Federation (IPAF), answers a handful of questions regarding AWP simulators and online training



Tony Groat

ALH: Does AWPT have simulators of AWP machinery? If so, how are those being used and are they effective?

Tony Groat: AWPT does not use simulators on AWP machinery. I have seen and used them, and while I believe they can be a supplement to AWP training, they are not a substitute for actual AWP operation. A simulator does not allow the trainee to experience being 15, 20 or 60 feet in the air, the sensation of the platform movement when you drive or elevate, the motion of the platform when you move the controller abruptly, etc. Like other new technologies, we can get a sense of what actual use is like, but there is not substitute from actually doing it. My 8-year-old nephew can obliterate me at Wii golf, but in reality, the results are different. Further, if a trainee has the time to operate a simulator, why not just place them in a real machine? Today's complaint is that training takes too long, so is adding the use of a simulator to the process a benefit? I also believe that availability and access to a simulator is limited and the need to AWP Training is extensive, so is it a viable tool in the market? I would not get hung up on technology being a fix for all of our needs - sometimes we just need to get away from the face of a computer and actually do it.



What is AWPT's take on online training? Good? Bad? Effective?

Groat: AWPT does not label training as good or bad, only different. How is online training being used? Is it part of a training program? A direct answer is that online training should be used as a complement in a training program. Online training does not afford the trainee to ask questions or receive more detailed explanations that an instructor can provide. Online training is generally fixed and cannot expand to address individual needs (ironworkers vs. electricians). Similarly, my written response to questions is not as effective as a face to face interview - my response to one question may cause other questions to arise. I believe that once an individual is properly training, the use of online training as a refresher is an excellent tool. For initial training, online training is too limiting.

On-line training also depends on the integrity of the applicant when undertaking the training. What prevents person A taking the test for person B?

Also, online training can only address the 'theory' portion required for AWP training and hands-on practical use is required. A trained operator is required to perform a prestart visual inspection and function test and a work place inspection. ANSI requires a trainee to actually operate an aerial platform (for each classification of AWP trained on). "Under the direction of a qualified person, the trainee shall operate the aerial platform for a sufficient period of time to demonstrate proficiency in the actual operation of the aerial platform." I would define the actual operation of the AWP to include prestart inspection, workplace inspection, and proficiency of use. Complete and proper theory training must be in place prior to a trainee being capable of those tasks.

"Online training is just a new, easy and inexpensive way to get workers trained appropriately," Lee says. "For some companies, a live trainer is perceived as the better option because they have an 'in-person is always better' mentality. However, anyone who has sat through a four to eight-hour course led by an instructor with a monotone voice knows different."

It could be best to measure training preferences individually for each person. Because in the end, what matters most is retention and skills - whether that be in-person or via the Internet, safety, theory and practice are what count.

ALH